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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001240

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2016  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [OREP](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: SENATOR DODD'S APRIL 19 LUNCH WITH  
PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS MOUAWAD AND HARB

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Christopher W. Murray. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

Participants:

U.S.  
Senator Christopher Dodd  
Charge d'Affaires Christopher Murray  
Lt. Col. Santiago Vaca, USAF  
Janice O'Connell, Senate Staff Member  
Kurt Mihelich  
Matt Pilcher (Embassy notetaker)

Lebanon  
MP Nayla Mouawad  
MP Boutros Harb  
MP Jawad Boulos

SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Senator Dodd's April 19 luncheon with Lebanese MPs Nayla Mouawad, Boutros Harb, and Jawad Boulos was dominated by a discussion of General Michel Aoun and his alliance with Hizballah. Mouawad and Harb characterized their rival for the presidency, Aoun, as a "Syrian agent" willing to sacrifice Lebanon's independence and security to fulfill his own dreams of becoming president. They said that Hizballah answers to Tehran and Damascus, undermining Lebanese sovereignty and progress. Mouawad said that Syria is waging a terrorist war against Lebanon through its residual intelligence network. Harb said that all the March 14 forces were asking of Aoun was to help them remove President Lahoud and elect a new president through a legal, constitutional, parliamentary process. Harb admitted, though, that he did not think Aoun would participate in such a plan -- he believes "the General" has sold his support to Damascus and Hizballah. Senator Dodd asked what the Lebanese public thought about the situation in Iraq, and Harb and Mouawad replied that they were concerned about the threat of spreading instability. Harb suggested the best thing the United States could do to improve its image in the Middle East would be to help solve the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. End summary.

AOUN, DAMASCUS AND HIZBALLAH  
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¶2. (C) "March 14 forces" MPs Boutros Harb and Nayla Mouawad spent the first hour of a lunch at Mouawad's residence with

Senator Christopher Dodd discussing Michel Aoun and the myriad reasons, in their view, that he is unfit to be president of Lebanon. Harb and Mouawad performed like a wrestling tag-team, alternating in their delivery of long monologues about Aoun's supposed perfidy and alliance with Hizballah and Syria. Mouawad told the Senator about Aoun's suspected deal with Syria, in which he would be allowed to return to Lebanon and pursue the presidency in exchange for his allegiance to Damascus and support for Hizballah. Harb delivered a long oral history of Aoun's quest for the presidency, culminating in his 1989 wars with the Lebanese Forces militia and Syria, and his subsequent exile in France.

13. (C) Harb and Mouawad worried that, by entering into an alliance with Hizballah, Aoun was undercutting Lebanese sovereignty and opening the gates for Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Boulos, who was otherwise conspicuously quiet, suggested that, as Aoun has already signed an agreement with Hizballah, it would be impossible for him to do anything to limit Hizballah's power. Mouawad said that Tehran's massive cash subsidies and arms shipments for Hizballah presented a serious threat to Lebanese sovereignty. She was disappointed that Aoun would take a position supporting this axis.

14. (C) Harb said that, ideally, he and his colleagues would like to see Aoun support the "March 14 forces" in forcing President Emile Lahoud to resign and elect a new president through a "legal, constitutional, parliamentary process." He admitted that this was unlikely, and that Syria and Hizballah would never let Aoun back out of their "deal" with him now. Mouawad said the "March 14 forces" could weaken Aoun's influence by outspending him on social programs. She then compared him to Hitler, saying that he was someone who had the support of his constituency, but would only lead them to ruin. "If he becomes president, we'll go back to civil war,"

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Harb added.

IRAQ AND THE PALESTINIANS

15. (C) Senator Dodd asked the parliamentarians about the Lebanese perspective on the situation in Iraq. Mouawad said that the Lebanese were worried by what appeared to be a deteriorating situation there. Harb added that it was possible to see the damage Saddam Hussein had wrought on Iraq during the course of his dictatorship, and said that something similar could happen in Syria if Bashar al-Asad suddenly fell from power.

16. (C) When Senator Dodd asked about the situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon, Mouawad -- who is also Minister of Social Affairs -- said it was very bad, adding that the Syrians have deeply infiltrated Lebanon's Palestinian camps and are continuing to arm them as well. Harb was skeptical that the Lebanese government would be able to remove unregulated Palestinian arms outside the camps within a self-imposed six-month deadline. He suggested that the United States "solve" the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to improve its standing in the Arab world.

17. (U) Codel Dodd has cleared this message.  
MURRAY